

Zen Master Yuan Shao and His Mission to Cochinchina in the Seventeenth Century

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When learning about the history of Buddhism in Vietnam, it is impossible not to mention the veteran bonzes of Linji School and Caodong School who traveled to Cochinchina to propagate Buddhism in the 17th century by sea. Zen Master Yuan Shao, known as one of the pioneers of Linji Chan School, laid the foundation for the formation and development of this school which still exists today. Based on previous studies from the perspective of Buddhist cultural exchanges between Cochinchina and China at that time, this article focuses on analyzing the social context, biography and preaching of Yuan Shao, a well-known zen master, in this area in order to present the significance of his contributions to Cochinchina Buddhism. The research methodology of the article is mainly based on the analysis and comparison of historical documents, records, related archeology. The above basic contents will be presented in an objective and systematic way as well as some raised scholarly debate is still ahead.

Keywords: Yuan Shao, Cochinchina Buddhism, Linji Chan School

Introduction

Dai Viet country, also known as Annam, the period of Trinh-Nguyen Civil War lasted for decades in the 17th century. In 1558, Nguyen Hoang Lord asked to defend in Thuan Hoa for fear of being harmed when he realized the intention of Trinh Kiem Lord that he would usurp the throne from King of Le dynasty. After that, Nguyen Lord, the defense commander of Cochinchina, wanted to build a secessionist and independent regime, so he gradually strengthened his forces to fight against Trinh Lord to create his own inheritance. From 1627, Nguyen Lord showed that he did not submit to the royal ordinance and decree as well as refused to pay taxes anymore. Regarding these, Trinh Lord thought that they were act of treason, against the court, and sent great troops to fight the Nguyen Lord in Cochinchina. In Tonkin, from the left bank of the Linh Giang River back to the North, Lord Trinh was in power; in Cochinchina, from the right bank of the Linh Giang River back in, it was ruled by Lord Nguyen. In Dai Viet, the King of Le dynasty still held the power to rule, but in reality all powers were manipulated by Lord Trinh. The capital of Dai Viet at that time was called Tonkin (or “Tong Kinh”) by European merchants; the southern region was called “Cochinchina”.

With the advantage of geographical location, convenient transportation, along with the open foreign trade policy of Cochinchina, it is not only beneficial to the development of trade but also becomes a bridge for cultural exchange with countries, such as China, Japan, Siam, Portugal, etc. It should also be recalled that

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Chinese veteran bonzes who came here to build pagodas to practice and propagate Chan thought when it came to cultural exchanges between Cochinchina and China at that time. Zen Master Yuan Shao, one of the famous Chinese monks, used to follow a merchant ship to spread the Linji Chan School in Cochinchina in the 17th century. When did he come to Cochinchina? Where? And how did he carry out his propaganda duty? This article will explore and analyze these issues in turn.

Cochinchina: A Destination for Chinese Chan Missions in the 17th Century

Nguyen Lord and his government were trying to build and strengthen political, military, economic, and social potentials. These aimed to create a new position capable of confronting Tonkin in continuous battles from 1627 to 1672, late 16th century to early 17th century, along with the formation of the Kingdom of Cochinchina. Obviously, Nguyen Lord and the army of Cochinchina, if they only rely on economic potential, are not strong enough to oppose the superior military force of Trinh Lord in Tonkin, because the agriculture of Cochinchina was a small, fragmented and unstable agriculture due to its dependence on natural conditions.

Therefore, along with agricultural development, Nguyen Lord knew how to take advantage of the favorable geographical position by building dozens of large and small trading ports to develop trade. These trading ports had many foreign trade activities with foreign countries which played a key role in the entire economy in Cochinchina at that time. The main export items in the foreign trade relationship between Cochinchina and China at that time could be mentioned as aquilaria crassna, agarwood, gold, sugar, valuable wood, dried fish, raw silk, pepper, etc. *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien*, the old historical book, recorded that the trading relationship between Cochinchina and major trading partners, such as China and Japan that: “There is no copper mine in the Thuan Quang region, so whenever the merchant ships from Fujian, Guangdong or Japan bring red copper to sell, the state buys it, and pays 40 or 50 coins for every 100 pounds” (Bureau of National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2002, p. 39). The formation of Chinese town, Japanese town, and a lot of foreign merchant ships flocking to the commercial port of Hoi An reflected the bustle and prosperity in foreign trade of Cochinchina at that time. Taxes collected from trading ports with foreign merchant ships landing to trade in Cochinchina became an important source of revenue in the national treasury: “According to Nguyen Lord law, every ship from Shanghai and Guangdong must paid 3,000 coins for landing, and 300 coins for leaving; Ships from Macao and Japan, had to pay 4,000 coins for landing, and 400 coins for leaving” (Tran, 2018, p. 266).

In diplomatic relations with China, Lord Nguyen behaved very kindly not only with the governors of Guangdong, Fujian, and Zhejiang provinces, but also with Chinese merchants doing their business here. According to the document of researcher Phan Khoang (1970), “The Chinese who sailed and were floated into the territorial waters of Cochinchina by storm, were treated kindly and helped to return home” (p. 524).

Regarding social life, the phenomenon of many families in Cochinchina took their children to pagodas to become monks aimed to avoid taking part in the army. The number of monastics at this time is very large, but just few people really understand the teachings of Buddha and the system of organization and precepts is not strict. Moreover, the event in 1682 also mentioned that Zen Master Huong Hai (香海), who had been a very famous Dharma preacher in Cochinchina and his 50 disciples decided to leave Cochinchina and sailed to the North to propagate the Dharma. This event happened because he was mistreated and suspected by Nguyen Phuc Tan Lord (1648-1687) that he was involved with the forces of Tonkin. And this was the reason that the Buddhist talent of Cochinchina is increasingly sparse.

In addition, the lives of the people of Cochinchina were also strongly influenced by natural disasters, floods, crop failures, famines, and epidemics that took place consecutively as in 1641, 1680, 1683, 1698 ... had been making the people of this region even more miserable. On the other hand, the Cochinchina government always had to live in a defensive position, ready to face fierce battles every time Trinh Lord sent troops to attack Cochinchina. At the same time, they had to be on the lookout for some rebel gangs killing local officials, robbing people's property and dealing with treason cases in the lands of Champa and Chenla. The people of Cochinchina always lived in a state of insecurity, worried about many unpredictable contingencies in that situation.

Facing this situation, the Nguyen Lords in Cochinchina chose Mahayana Buddhism, a religion with thoughts of four immeasurable minds or four infinite minds (loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity). A religion combined with a liberal spirit, tolerant of differences and oppositions in society as a foundation to strengthen spiritual life and social harmony. Moreover, Buddhism also brings stable and positive inner strength, enough to ease the worries and insecurities in the minds of the inhabitants on this new land. Nguyen Lang, author of the book *Vietnam Buddhist History*, commented on this issue as follows:

So, in the mind of Nguyen Lords, Buddhism can be a spiritual refuge in the process of building their country. Therefore, later, the Nguyen Lords all showed great devotion to Buddhism and the people of Cochinchina also welcomed the Chinese wandering monks with a sincere and warm heart. (Nguyen, 2000, p. 584)

Thus, with a convenient geographical position and extremely convenient sea traffic for merchant ships traveled between China and Cochinchina, as well as political and social conditions with an open and friendly attitude, even the propagation and development of Buddhism in Cochinchina was supported by the Nguyen Lords and residents, it is clear that the Nguyen Lords and the local people have made this land to become the destination that meets the criteria of "natural time, favorable terrain, and human harmony" for the overseas preaching mission of the Chinese wandering monks. One of the typical Chinese veteran bonzes for these activities is Zen Master Yuan Shao.

Zen Master Yuan Shao and the Mission of Linji Chan School to Cochinchina

Zen Master Yuan Shao (元韶) also called Nguyen Thieu was one of the Chinese monks who lived in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties who followed the merchant ship to spread the Linji Chan School in Cochinchina in the 17th century. Dharma name system of Buddhism of Yuan Shao monk was quite fully recorded in the inscription which engraved on stone stele at Quoc An pagoda as follows:

Zen master Huan Bi (焕碧), surname Xie (谢), originally from Cheng Xiang (程乡), Chaozhou (潮州府), Guangdong province, China, was born on the hour of the Dog on May 18, the year of the Rats (1648). When he was just 19 years old, he left his parents and went to Bao Zi (报资) pagoda to become a monk and study Chan Buddhism with the Most Ven. Kuang Yuan (旷圆), got Dharma name was Yuan Shao, alias name was Huan Bi. (Thich, 2019, p. 188)

In fact, he also has another Dharma name, Chao Bai (超白); in other words, he has two different Dharma names, Yuan Shao Buddha name with alias Shou Zun (寿尊), and Chao Bai Buddha name with alias Huan Bi (焕碧), but they are the same person. The reason why Zen Master Yuan Shao has two different Dharma names; because progenitor of Yuan Shao monk, Senior Most venerable Dao Min Mu Chen (道闽木陈), 31st generation progenitor of Linji Chan School at first time to study with Zen Master Zhi Ming Ruo Mei (智明若昧) on Lushan mountain, was given the Dharma name Dao Min Mu Chen. Later, Zen Master Dao Min studied and

obtained the Dharma with the Patriarch Yuan Wu Mi Yun (圆悟密云) who practiced meditation at Tian Tong (天童) Pagoda, was given another Dharma name as Tong Tian Hong Jue (通天弘觉) after the lineage of dharma transmission lines of Zen Master Zu Ding Xue Feng (祖定雪峰), the 22nd generation as following: “祖道戒定宗，方广证圆通，行超明实济，了达悟真空” (Thich, 2019, p. 86).

Later, Zen master Dao Min Mu Chen (another dharma name is Tong Tian Hong Jue) gave his disciples a dharma name, on the one hand, following the lineage verse of Zen Master Zu Ding Xue Feng as above. He named his disciples from the word “Hang” (行), on the other hand, set up its own verse of Dharma transmission (Dao Min branch) as follows: “道本元诚佛祖先，明如洪日丽忠天，灵源广润慈丰普，照世真灯万古传” (Thich, 2019, p. 87).

For this reason, Zen Master Ben Gao Kuang Yuan (本稿旷圆), the 32nd descendant of Linji Chan School, is the teacher of Yuan Shao whose dharma name begins with the word “Ben” (本). This Dharma name was the original lineage verse of Dao Min founder who also has another Dharma name which was given by Dao Min. This Buddha name is based on the lineage verse of progenitor Zu Ding Xue Feng that starts with the word “Hang”, called Hang Yuan Ben Guo (行圆本果). Likewise, in the 33rd generation of Linji Chan School, master Yuan Shao took his Dharma name based on the lineage of Dao Min branch, which is called Yuan Shao Shou Zun (元韶寿尊) that began with the word “Yuan” (元). At the same time, he was also given another Dharma name according to the lineage of Senior master Zu Ding Xue Feng. This lineage began with the word “Chao” (超), which was called Chao Bai Huan Bi (超白焕碧).

After obtaining Dhamma, Zen Master Yuan Shao swore an oath that he would cross the sea to spread the universal Dharma to all sentient beings. At a certain level of awareness, behind the oath of this Patriarch was the common sentiment of many contemporary intellectuals when the Qing dynasty replaced the Ming dynasty. As dynasties change, society also changes, the old and the new intertwine; Mahayana Buddhism in the country was somewhat not respected and protected as in previous dynasties.

When and where did Zen master Yuan Shao follow to Cochinchina by sea and officially transmit the Dharma? Based on the original text which engraved on the stone stele at the tower of founder Yuan Shao by Dai Viet Monarch in 1729, it wrote: “There is Senior Zen Master Huan Bi, in the year of Snakes (1665), the relic at Quy Ninh town (Quy Nhon-Binh Dinh), who founded Thap Thap Di Da pagoda (十塔弥陀寺) to spread the Dharma of Buddha” (Thich, 2019, p. 188). This detail is similarly recorded in *Dai Nam Liet Truyen Tien Bien*:

In the 17th year of Thai Tong Emperor, the year of Snakes (1665), Yuan Shao followed merchant ships to the South, took a tin can at Quy Ninh town, built Thap Thap Di Da pagoda, enlarged Dharma of Buddha in this place. (Do, 1994, p. 192)

The only difference is that this work more clearly states that the monk Yuan Shao from China followed merchant ships to Cochinchina by sea. This document has provided us with the means and the way that Zen Master Yuan Shao came to Cochinchina as well as the first Buddhist work, he built, Thap Thap Di Da Pagoda (still today) in Quy Ninh town. He took this place as a place to spread the Linji Chan School in this land.

However, the chronology of the two documents mentioned above may not be accurate when discussing the time when Senior Master Yuan Shao went to Annam in 1665. Moreover, the researcher, Ha Xuan Liem, pointed out the contradiction has the following speculations:

At the age of 19, the year of Horses (1666), he just ordained to Bao Zi Pagoda to receive ordination with Most Ven. Ben Gao Kuang Yuan, so, how could he go to the South in the year of the Snakes (1665)? Therefore, after carefully

calculating the year that accorded to “Ganzhi” (干支, the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches of Chinese ancient cosmology), it showed that he went to the South in 1677 which is the year of the Snakes. (Thich & Ha, 2006, p. 133)

Thus, it is possible that in the epitaph and in the book *Dai Nam Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, had mistakenly written the word “Dinh” (丁) from “Dinh Ty” (丁巳) to the word “At” (乙).

When compared with the record of events inscribed on the stone stele of Thap Thap Pagoda by the Most Ven. Chon Luan Phuoc Hue, the 40th generation of the main lineage of the Linji Chan School, the abbot of Thap Thap Pagoda, who asked Vo Khac Trien, Academician Expositor-in-waiting (who was a royal court teacher) wrote the text in the 3rd year of Bao Dai King (1928) as follows:

There is an old citadel called Vijaya citadel (Do Ban citadel), distance from the North of Binh Dinh citadel about 7 km, the capital of Champa in the past. Thap Thap Hill is located in the north of this citadel, Thap Thap Pagoda was built on this hill by the Most Ven. Huan Bi was a veteran bonze who came from Guangdong province in the Qing Dynasty. In the 4th year of Chanh Hoa period (1683) of the Le Dynasty, Most Ven. Huan Bi with his pewter staff came from China to Cochinchina and he chose to stay in the land of Vijaya citadel. Moreover, he enlarged the Thap Thap Hill and rebuilt a Buddhist pagoda here. Ten towers were still here when Most Ven. Huan Bi built the pagoda and that is why the temple was also named Thap Thap. (Thich, 2019, p. 204)

When Most Ven. Yuan Shao came to Quy Ninh and built Thap Thap pagoda in 1683, he was 35 years old; at that time (1677), it was based on the details which mentioned in the epitaph here. But Nguyen Lang (2000), author of the book *Vietnam Buddhist History*, conjectured that: “*Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* book said that this pagoda was founded in 1683 and this date is probably the date of completion of the pagoda after many years of construction” (p. 586). If the above statement of author Nguyen Lang is correct, then it can be estimated that Thap Thap pagoda will take at least 5-6 years to complete. So, it is possible that Zen Master Yuan Shao came to Quy Ninh town around the year of Snakes (1677); that year he was about 29-30 years old. It should also be clarified that, as a monk from China, Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao could not have just arrived in Quy Ninh and was not able to build a pagoda immediately. First, he had to find out the location, chose a good land to build the pagoda, listened to the political situation and the attitude of the Nguyen Lord and his officers toward Buddhism in Cochinchina. Besides, he also needed time to adapt, integrate, and build relationships with all classes of residents here from the working class, merchants, intellectuals to local officials. From those relationships, he made his mind to mobilize donations of merit to complete the Three Jewels house. Therefore, it is completely understandable to estimate that it will take at least five to six years to complete.

In preaching career of Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao in Cochinchina, in addition to being the founder of Thap Thap pagoda in Quy Nhon, his conducted behavior has many other important contributions to Buddhism in Cochinchina. In the research work of Venerable Thich Vien Kien, he mentioned in detail the conducted behavior of Yuan Shao founder as follows:

In the year of Pigs (1683), the 4th year of Chanh Hoa, after the construction of Thap Thap pagoda was completed, Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao had to quickly come to Xuan Kinh following the invitation of Hien Lord (Nguyen Phuc Tan) to propagate the Buddha’s teachings in Thuan Hoa. Thap Thap Pagoda was handed over to Zen Master Xing Ti Dao Yuan (性題道元), who was the replacement for founder, continue building and teaching monks. Tu Dung estuary in Phu Loc district was his first destination. Here, he built Ha Trung pagoda and left here soon after the pagoda was completed. After that, he continued to Phu Xuan mountain to rebuild Quoc An pagoda and construct Pho Dong tower at Hoa Thien hill which was on the left side of Ngu Binh mountain to serve as a basis for spreading the Buddha’s teachings. (Thich, 2019, pp. 91-92)

Due to the lack of detailed documents on the construction of Ha Trung pagoda by Zen Master Yuan Shao, there are many different views about it nowadays. Some documents have suggested that this pagoda was formed long before Senior master Yuan Shao arrived. As for the establishment of Quoc An pagoda and Pho Dong tower in Phu Xuan by monk Yuan Shao, researcher Ha Xuan Liem cited related documents as follows:

Basing on documents recording the activities of Quoc An Pagoda, in the 5th year of Chinh Hoa period (1684), King Le Hi Ton in Thang Long and Hien Vuong Nguyen Phuc Tan (1648-1687) in Thuan Hoa, this Nguyen Lord bestowed Yuan Shao a subsidized account to build pagodas. Thus, it is impossible to guess what year the pagoda was built and how it was built? Or could the pagoda be built in 1682 or 1684? There are also no documents left which just saying that right next to the temple, he built an architecture which was called Dong Pho tower, or Pho Dong tower. (Thich & Ha, 2006, pp. 137-138)

Unfortunately, Pho Dong tower was destroyed by fire in 1786. Conjecturing about the year when Quoc An pagoda was completed, the author Ha Xuan Liem cited the following event:

In the 10th year of Chanh Hoa, on May 17, the year of Snakes (July 13, 1689), Anh Tong Hieu Nghia Emperor, Nguyen Phuc Thai Lord (1687-1691) had approved a ratification of a decree exempting the temple land from tax decree and changing Vinh An pagoda became “Sac Tu Quoc An Tu” (册赐国恩寺). Thus, the name of Quoc An pagoda, which *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* wrote, is from the year of Snakes (1689). (Thich & Ha, 2006, p. 138)

Not only did he build pagodas and towers, Zen Master Yuan Shao also served comply with orders from Nguyen Lord to return to Guangdong to invite Most Ven. Shi Lian Da Shan (石濂大汕) to Thuan Hoa as well as brought back many Buddha statues and Buddhist ritual implements. In the inscription engraved on the stone stele of Quoc An pagoda, it was said as follows:

It is known that the Lord of the previous dynasty (Nghia Lord Nguyen Phuc Tran) asked Zen Master Yuan Shao to return to Guangdong to invite Most Ven. Shi Lian at Chang Shou pagoda and brought Buddha statues as well as Buddhist ritual implements to bring back to the country. All of the above work was completed and left a lot of merit. Then from here, Zen Master Yuan Shao complied with a royal ordinance and became to the abbot of Ha Trung Pagoda. (Thich, 2019, p. 188)

Compared with the narration of Most Ven. Shi Lian Da Shan in *Hai ngoai ky su* book (Overseas Memoir), it is recorded as follows: “Since the previous Lord (Nghia Lord) had invitation letters three times, three times, I thought it was sincere” (Thich, 1963, p. 19). Notably, Most Ven. Shi Lian Da Shan wrote that Dai Viet King sent envoys from Min province (Fujian) to deliver letters and offer offerings on the third invitation to see Most Venerable on August 4th of the year of the Dogs, the 3rd year of Kangxi Emperor, 1694. From this, it is deduced that the royal ordinance obeyed from Nghia Lord of monk Yuan Shao returned to Guangdong to invite the Most Ven. Shi Lian Da Shan happened in the first or second invitation, during the reign of Nguyen Phuc Tran Lord (1687-1691).

It has been recorded about the passed away of Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao in the merited stone stele at Quoc An Pagoda as follows: “It has been more than 50 years since crossing the sea to our country, during a mild illness, the Senior Zen Master entered the realm of impermanence on October 19th the year of Monkeys (1728)”. He summoned all disciples to teach Dharma, an occult language before he passed away and penned a verse that read:

寂寂境无影 Silent mirror without shadow
明明珠不容 Shine bright pearls

堂堂物非物 Clear things are not things
 寥寥空物空 Empty and empty.

After writing the verse, senior zen master took cross-legged in peace and passed away at the age of 81 years. His disciples, dignitaries and officers who home-practiced made the stupa in Cua Hoa area to enter the body of senior zen master and kneel down to ask me to give the inscription record words. I bestowed the posthumous name and title “Hanh Doan Most Venerable” (Thich, 2019, pp. 188-189).

Through the verse of entered the realm of impermanence, Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao conceives that the true nature is inherently calm and luminous, and nothing can compare with its clear characteristics, including the beauty of pearls. He had reminded his disciples of the principle of meditated studying and practicing that the main thing is not to get attached to any object, whether it is clinging to the concept of wonderful emptiness (non-physical things, non-nothing things), emphasizing the transcendent *prajna* thought of “sunyata”. Practitioner or meditator can truly realize and reach the state of absolute freedom and be unencumbered by anything when one understands “sunyata”.

There are different opinions about the year that Most Ven. Yuan Shao passed away, because there are not enough documents to collate with the text had engraved on the stone stele at Quoc An Pagoda. The inscription on the stele states of pagoda that he had gone into his perfect rest died in 1728. For example, Nguyen Lang was based on the details recorded in the book *Hai ngoai ky su* of Most Ven. Shi Lian Da Shan. This work referred to the year 1695 when he visited Ha Trung pagoda. But Most Ven. Da Shan did not only meet Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao, but also meet a warden monk in this pagoda, from which he said that:

Monk Yuan Shao had entered the impermanent realm before 1695, which was the year that Most Ven. Da Shan came to Dai Viet. The date of 1729 inscribed on Quoc An stele which was only the date of the establish of stele, it was not the perfect resting date of Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao. (Nguyen, 2000, p. 587)

However, through the discovery the tomb construction form with catacomb type “Kim Tinh” (金井) below when restoring the stupa background of Yuan Shao founder at Kim Cang Pagoda (Dong Nai) in 1989. From this discovery, researcher Nguyen Hien Duc hypothesized that:

The stupa of Yuan Shao founder in Kim Cang pagoda may be the main stupa and if so, the Hoa Mon (or Cua Hoa) stupa in Hue may be the stupa for worship from a distance. Although it is a distant worship stupa, it still plays an important role because it was bestowed the inscription record text by Nguyen Phuoc Tru Lord. (Nguyen, 1995, p. 125)

Nguyen Hien Duc also said that from 1692, Nguyen Lord kept a cautious attitude and did not respect Yuan Shao after the rebellion of A Ban, a Chinese rebel. After that, Nguyen Lord sent him to be the abbot of Ha Trung Pagoda, a temple located quite far from Phu Xuan citadel. After 1694, there was a riot of the Chinese group that led by Guang Fu in Cochinchina. Guang Fu was a man who used to live in Quy Ninh where Yuan Shao constructed Thap Thap pagoda before. Thus, it is likely that he was afraid of being implicated, so he quietly left Ha Trung Pagoda to the South. In the South, he secluded himself from society and established Kim Cang Pagoda in Dong Nai as a place for Buddha worship and propaganda from 1694 until his death in 1728 (Nguyen, 1995, p. 135). However, this hypothesis is just his own deduction that has not been agreed by other researchers.

The Significance of Zen Master Yuan Shao's Contributions to Buddhism in Cochinchina in the 17th Century

Academic Significance

As we analyzed at the beginning of paper, the situation of Buddhism in Cochinchina in the 17th century, especially after the event in 1682, which mentioned Zen Master Huong Hai and 50 disciples from this region sailed to Tonkin for preaching Buddha teachings. This event made the situation of Buddhism in Cochinchina severely affected and damaged. In addition, the Trinh-Nguyen civil war occurred due to the division of territory, which made some Meditation School sects in Tonkin, which were very popular in Tonkin in the past, not qualified to propagate and develop in Cochinchina. Therefore, through the propagation of faith by Zen Master Yuan Shao in Cochinchina at that time, Linji Chan School from China was able to exist and develop in this land. Linji Chan School has contributed to enriching and diversifying sects, thoughts, and lineages, as well as laying the foundation for the academic development of Cochinchina Buddhism up to now. From Senior master Yuan Shao, the 33rd patriarch of Linji Chan School, who built Thap Thap Di Da pagoda, the lineage of this Chan School has continued to the 42nd generation nowadays. Summarizing the significant, value and great merit of Yuan Shao, the founder of Thap Thap pagoda, Venerable Thich Vien Kien has the following comments:

Since the founding of Patriarch Yuan Shao until now, there have been 15 generations of the abbot in which including an outstanding talented and eloquent apologist, a famous conducted according to Buddha truth person, a moral excellence meditator all which pervaded to help human and sentient beings. All generations of bhikkhus here, forever continue to restore temples, rebuild meditation halls, dress the percepts of their Chan School, train monks, and rescue all sentiment as well as non-sentiment beings. The correct doctrine of the Buddha (Saddharma) was still widely praised, the Buddha seeds are scattered everywhere, and people are also seized Dharma. Sangha was bestowed by royal decree and bhikkhus were invited to capital propagating the Buddha teachings when King and the court officials heard the name from famous monks. (Thich, 2019, p. 180)

Practical Significance

The mission of applied and theorized handed down of Senior Yuan Shao in Cochinchina acted like a breath of fresh air which blow into the spiritual life of Cochinchina society at that time. During more than 50 years of teaching in this area, he has had merit in Thap Thap pagoda foundation in Quy Ninh (Binh Dinh), building Quoc An pagoda, Pho Dong tower, Ha Trung pagoda in Thuan Hoa, and maybe he built Kim Cang pagoda in Dong Nai. With traditional and rich history, these ancient pagodas are not only Buddhist halls, foundational halls, Buddhism lecture halls, monasteries but also these were training places for bhikkhus generations and holy relics for posterity.

Founder Yuan Shao had well trained many excellent disciples for the Linji Chan School in Cochinchina. They followed his brilliant career and went to many places in the central and southern regions of Cochinchina to establish pagodas and preach down the Buddha teachings to sentiment beings, such as zen masters: Minh Giac-Ky Phuong, Minh Luong-Nguyen An, Minh Vat-Nhat Tri, Minh Hai-Phap Bao, Minh Hang-Dinh Nhien, Thanh Nhac-An Son, Thanh Chi-Phap Thong, Thanh Ngo-Nghiem An, etc. The Venerable Thich Mat The (2004) emphasized the significant and wide and deep influence of Linji Chan School on Cochinchina Buddhism as follows: "Nowadays, most of the Buddhist followers in Central and Southern of Vietnam belong to the Linji Chan lineage" (p. 215). Moreover, founder Yuan Shao also preached Buddha teachings, held Buddhist ceremonies for followers who would take refuge in the Three Jewels, once complied with orders from

Nguyen Phuc Tran Lord backing to Guangdong, invited Most Venerable Shi Lian Da Shan to Thuan Hoa, brought Buddha statues, Buddhist ritual implements etc. for Cochinchina, typically a Buddha statue about three meters high in Ha Trung pagoda—where he once abbot. Thich Hai An and Ha Xuan Liem (2006) stated in their work:

Legend has it that he installed a very large stone statue of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva at this pagoda and said that it was the most important statue that he had brought from China; It still exists and is a treasure of Buddhism in Thua Thien Hue at the present. (p. 139)

Cultural Significance

The achievement of more than 50 years of Buddhism doctrines preached by Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao in Cochinchina was also reflected in the fact that he had partly met the religious needs, which were indispensable in the spiritual life of Buddhists in particular as well as a part of the community of the inhabitants on this land in general. His sermons taught them to practice well and avoid evil, to live with moral compassion, and harmony of Buddhism ethics. These, at the same time, helped them reduce psychological worries when living with harsh nature as well as socio-political changes in the new land. Contributions of Yuan Shao were not only in cultural and humankind aspect within training talented monks, focusing on maintaining percepts in monasteries, but also intangible and intangible culture, such as architectural art works of pagodas, towers, sculptures, Buddha statues, performing important Buddhist rituals and ceremonies in Cochinchina, etc. The meritorious achievements of Senior master Yuan Shao all contained important Buddhist cultural values, contributed to the formation and development of Buddhism in Cochinchina. These achievements were not only meaningful to Cochinchina or Vietnamese Buddhism, but also had a certain significance for traditional Mahayana Buddhism, especially Chinese Chan Schools from China.

Conclusion

In the preaching talented and merited praise of Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao for Cochinchina Buddhism was engraved on the stele from his Foundational stupa at Quoc An pagoda with the following respectful words: “Illuminating to ego in Meditation, precepting mysterious dogma with wisdom, entering the canon by undecipherable words, encouraging to stop doing evil and do good, teaching Dharma for the following learners, transmitting percepts to the four orders” (Thich, 2019, p. 188).

These praises were fully and accurately reflected to perfect meritorious achievements that Senior Zen Master Yuan Shao who was a lifelong devoted person, had served Buddhism and delivered sentient beings. He deserved to be recognized that he was one of the best examples among Chinese monks who had preached the Buddhism doctrines in Annam and contributed to the Buddhist cultural exchange historical relationship between Sino-Cochinchina at that time.

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